

REPUBLICANS AND RED INK: **As Public Debt Spirals Out of Control,** **Guess Who Changed Their Tune?**



Over the past decade, Republican rhetoric opposing increases in the public debt limit has been unabashed and unequivocal. “Don’t do it,” they said. But now, after proclaiming their commitment to fiscal discipline and reducing the national debt, Congressional Republicans are poised to take action that completely contradicts their earlier statements. And this is not the first time! In fact, it is the second time in less than a year that Republicans have sought to increase the statutory debt limit, which now stands at \$6.4 trillion.

What’s worse, House Republicans are trying to slip a debt limit increase through the legislative process without even requiring Members to vote on it. In a repudiation of their own “Contract With America,” Republicans revived a House rule in January that deems passed by the House a Joint Resolution that increases the debt ceiling whenever a budget resolution conference report is enacted. Thus, if Republicans have their way, they’ll never have to vote for this debt limit increase.

Two years ago, this action would have been unnecessary. After four straight years of record federal budget surpluses during the Clinton Administration, our nation was reducing its public debt. But then came the Republicans’ \$1.7 trillion tax cut, which resulted in a return to budget deficits, including an anticipated deficit of up to \$400 billion this year alone. The two questions that every American ought to ask are: How are we going to pay for another round of unaffordable tax cuts when we are projecting a record budget deficit this year and increasing the public debt? And, why don’t Republicans care about reducing the debt, after saying for years that they did?

Republicans Decry Debt

- “You see, certain lawmakers around this place, have hopes of hiding a debt limit increase in a jungle of budget resolutions and conference reports. Mr. Speaker, before we give them license to start construction, we must demand a separate vote on increasing the debt limit...”
 - House GOP Conference Chair Deborah Pryce, OH [Cong. Record, 3/25/93]

- Between now and the next Presidential election – through the end of Fiscal Year 1996 – the public debt will increase by almost \$1.3 trillion. During President Reagan’s first term, the debt ceiling was increased from \$935 billion to \$1.824 trillion. That’s an increase of \$889 billion. It took us over 200 years to get \$1 trillion in debt, over 200 years, and in the last 10 years we have gone to over \$4 trillion in debt . . . all of that so-called stimulus package is deficit spending. None of that spending, none of it, is paid for. All of it borrows money to pay for it. That is part of why we are raising the debt ceiling.”

 - Majority Leader Tom DeLay, TX [Cong. Record, 3/29/93]
- "Here we are being asked this week to raise the debt ceiling so that this Government can go on borrowing money to take care of its spending habits, and I think that is outrageous. I hope Members of this House will vote against raising the debt ceiling, and I hope the American people will contact the Members of this House, Mr. Speaker, and urge them to vote against raising the debt ceiling..."

 - Majority Leader Tom DeLay, TX [Cong. Record, 3/29/93]
- "[I]f we need to do other things to balance the budget, let us do it, but, first and foremost, we have got to shoot straight with the American people, and hiding things like this debt ceiling increases is not the way to do that."

 - Rep. Dan Burton, IN [Cong. Record, 3/29/93]
- "If we get to \$6 or \$8 trillion in debt , we are going to end up with probably 40 percent of all spending being spent just on interest alone. That means that we will not be able to take care of not only the military, but Social Security, welfare, the infrastructure of the country, and a lot of other things. What would that do to people on fixed income, people who are senior citizens on Social Security, welfare recipients or a lot of other people, those who are retired and get pensions?"

 - Rep. Dan Burton, IN [Cong. Record, 3/29/93]
- "Let me tell you what we are doing here tonight. You are ordering beefsteak, and you have already ordered it. And you have eaten it, and you have given them your credit card. And then you found out that you are over your credit limit. But because you do not have a constitutional amendment that says you have got to live within your credit limit, you are just going to raise it arbitrarily so that you can continue your spending habits."

 - Majority Leader Tom DeLay, TX [Cong. Record, 4/1/93]
- "If I were a freshman Member of this body being told I had to vote to increase the debt by \$225 billion, leaving that obligation to my children and my grandchildren, to cover someone else's spending excesses, I would tell them to go take a hike."

 - Former Rep. Bill Archer, TX [Cong. Record, 4/1/93]
- "You have, in the past few days, passed an outline for the largest tax increase in the history of this Nation. Be proud of that. We are struggling with a pork-laden so-called stimulus package that will add \$16 billion to the national deficit before Easter. Be proud of that. We raised the debt limit yesterday to the highest it has ever been in history. Be proud of that."

 - Rep. Joel Hefley, CO [Cong. Record, 4/2/93]
- "The debt in this country continues to grow every year, the interest piles up and we load it on our children without regard to what it does to them or our future. That ought to end and it ought to end today... Let me tell you emphatically if Social Security is to be protected in this country we have got to stop building up debt."

 - Energy and Commerce Committee Chair Billy Tauzin, LA [Cong. Record, 3/17/94]
- "Do you know what we are doing when we borrow all this money and go into debt like we are today? We are saying to our kids and our grandkids, we are going to make you pay this back out of earnings and wages that you have not even earned yet, possibly that you have not even had a chance to go through school yet, and yet we are saying to you that our overindulgence today is going to be paid for by your earnings 10, 20, 30, 40, 50 years from now. How do we get to a balanced budget? Well, the debt limit and the vote on increasing the debt limit is not a way to have leverage."

 - Rep. Nick Smith, MI [Cong. Record, 11/1/95]
- "The Federal Government is \$4.9 trillion in debt. It is immoral for us to continue to borrow from the future of our children. We must take the steps necessary to balance the budget...We Republicans

simply refuse to proceed any further with politics as usual. We will not continue the mindless spending and borrowing that is bankrupting our children's future and destroying any hope they have of achieving the American Dream. We will not vote to extend the debt limit..."

- Rep. Charles Norwood, GA [Cong. Record, 11/14/95]

- "Over the last year, Republicans in Congress have felt pretty strongly about the need to bring fiscal responsibility to Washington, DC. We have accumulated some \$5 trillion worth of debt, that none of us in this room are ever really going to pay off. Our children and our grandchildren are going to pay that off. We are imprisoning our children and our grandchildren by our irresponsibility over the last 25 to 30 years... The President of the United States wants us to give him a clean increase in the debt limit. He wants to put more debt on the backs of our children.... I have to tell Members the frustration amongst Members on both sides of this Capitol about the refusal of the President of the United States to deal honestly with trying to bring fiscal responsibility to Washington is excessive."
 - Education and Workforce Committee Chair John Boehner, OH [Cong. Record, 1/31/96]
- "What is the President of the United States asking? Raise the debt limit. Let us have more debt. The fact is, it is time to get serious about balancing the budget of the United States and saving the future for our kids and theirs. Oh, but no, we do not want to do that. The President says we can agree on the numbers, but we will save the policies until later: The same kind of Washington gimmicks, the same kind of smoke and mirrors that have been used in this town to say one thing and do something else, year after year after year."
 - Education and Workforce Committee Chair John Boehner, OH [Cong. Record, 2/1/96]
- "Members of this House are either for protecting Social Security and Medicare and paying down the debt, or they are not."
 - Rep. Wally Herger, CA [CNN, 9/18/00]

Republicans Vow to Reduce Debt

- "When I arrived in this institution thirteen years ago, the idea of passing a budget that would actually pay down over \$130 billion dollars worth of debt would have been laughable. Even five years ago, the thought of debt reduction was just that – a thought. But now it is a reality."
 - Speaker Dennis Hastert, IL [Cong. Record, 11/9/99]
- "A principal goal of the President and his budget is dramatic reduction of the national debt."
 - OMB Director Mitch Daniels [AP, 2/28/01]
- "[M]y budget pays down a record amount of national debt. We will pay off \$2 trillion of debt over the next decade. That will be the largest debt reduction of any country, ever. Future generations shouldn't be forced to pay back money that we have borrowed. We owe this kind of responsibility to our children and grandchildren."
 - Pres. George W. Bush [AP, 3/3/01]
- "Republicans believe repaying debt is the right thing to do. It is wrong for this generation to saddle future generations with debts."
 - GOP House Budget Committee [Statement, 3/13/01]
- "Today's report, just like last week's review, simply tells us that we will not be able to pay off as much debt as soon as we originally had wanted - nothing more, nothing less. Even so, nearly \$150 billion can go to paying off the national debt this year alone because we have the second largest budget surplus in American history."
 - Speaker Dennis Hastert, IL [Press Release, 8/27/01]
- "We have a solid financial foundation to build on to get us back to balance. In the meantime, we are still paying down the debt and working our way back to surpluses."
 - Budget Committee Chair Jim Nussle, IA [Press Release, 10/30/01]
- "The final numbers are in and they show we are still on track, paying down historic amounts of the public debt. I'm proud of the fact that we paid off \$90 billion dollars of the public debt last year. That's the second largest debt pay off in history."
 - Budget Committee Chair Jim Nussle, IA [Press Release, 10/30/01]